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GNP and the Voter

YOU CAN forget about Quemoy and Matsu and the bigots and which candidate wears the toupee on the TV. The secret ingredient in this campaign is money. It's the one fundamental issue and the only point on which Vice President Nixon and Sen. Kennedy have taken totally irreconcilable positions.

Where the candidates stand—and what their policies mean in simple lunch money and carfare economics—was set forth with commendable clarity on last evening's CBS report, "Money and the Next President."

A running debate between the two men was threaded through the economic labyrinth, all statements being culled from what must by now be several million feet of campaign oratory, from whistlestop to Great Debate.

The Kennedy view, as anybody with a TV set can tell you, is that the nation must move ahead at full speed, provide full employment, impregnable defenses, better schools and economic justice for all. The Senator says it every night on the TV news.

Mr. Nixon's philosophy stresses individual enterprise and warns that government-stimulated growth will produce inflation and unbalance the budget. He doesn't say it as

often, but Sen. Kennedy's remarks make it clear where his opponent stands.

Now, then, to understand the full implications of the economic debate you must have at least a dim notion of such terms as the Gross National Product, protective tariffs, balance of payments and, of course, inflation.

The highest compliment I can pay last evening's discourse was that it made all those terms comprehensible to a noneconomist who has trouble making change for a quarter. The crisp, concise delivery of our host and narrator, Howard K. Smith, helped, too.

Masses of merchandise were spilled over the screen as Mr. Smith explained that the GNP is all the goods and services produced by 69 million employed Americans each year. Total worth: \$500 billion.

If your private economic world is bounded by such matters as mortgage payments and the dentist's bill, you may wonder why either candidate bothers about money when Uncle Sam is obviously vulgar-rich.

Well, one problem is the billions aren't dispersed with perfect wisdom. (Nor, a woman would say, with very good taste. Two billion dollars a year on candy, for heaven's sake. And 280 million on tranquilizers and 50 million on comic books.)

And here's a statistic to make you look down in shame: We spend 3 billions a year on cosmetics and beauty aids, only 2½ billion on new schools and education aids.

Secretary of the Treasury Anderson and economist Gabriel Hauge, former Eisenhower adviser, spoke up for the Nixon view that private enterprise will spur the economic growth of the nation.

As for the gap between our economic growth and that of the Soviet Union, there seem to be no reliable GNP statistics and no clear agreement. Allan Dulles of the CIA was quoted as saying the Russians were far ahead of us. An economist named Colin Clark appeared last night to announce that Dulles was all wrong.

And so it went, both sides fair and square. And on Nov. 8, we'll choose a man who will decide the fate of "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

Harriet Van Horne